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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7616
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 006358

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [OSCE](#) [GG](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: U.S.-RUSSIA TALKS ON THE CAUCASUS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) DAS Kramer accompanied by the DCM called on Russian MFA Fourth CIS Department Director (DAS equivalent) Andrey Kelin June 13 to discuss Caucasus issues. (Kramer met subsequently one-on-one with DFM Karasin on other regional agenda items.) Kramer pushed Kelin hard on Russia's support for separatism in South Ossetia. Kelin denied annexationist aspirations and said Russia's two goals for the breakaway province are to avoid renewed fighting and provide humanitarian assistance. Kelin hoped to avoid a worst-case outcome from the Putin-Saakashvili meeting scheduled for later that day. Kramer and Kelin praised U.S.-Russian cooperation on Nagorno-Karabakh. Kramer cautioned Kelin regarding public statements affecting U.S. interests at the upcoming SCO summit. End Summary.

SCO

2. (C) DAS Kramer led off a June 13 meeting with Kelin by reiterating the U.S. position on the upcoming summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Kramer urged that there be no repetition of last year's call for a deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. bases from Central Asia. He also hoped the SCO would not become a platform for unhelpful statements by Iranian President Ahmadi-Nejad. Kelin replied that he would pass Kramer's comments on to FM Lavrov, who would begin preparing for the SCO meeting when he returned from St. Petersburg.

Georgia-Russia and Saakashvili-Putin

3. (C) Kelin promised to get Kramer a readout of the meeting, scheduled for later that day, between the Russian and Georgian Presidents. Kelin said Russia had prepared "constructively" through meetings with Georgia's Abkhazia negotiator Alasania and DFM Antadze. Kelin did not, however, think that positions had been bridged. He complained that Georgia, the "feebler" interlocutor, was not coming to Russia hat in hand, but rather "giving us the chance to make peace with it."

4. (C) Kelin said the Georgians wanted from the meeting a joint statement recognizing South Ossetia as part of Georgia. Russia believed that was putting the cart before the horse. In negotiations on Kosovo and Cyprus, the parties started with confidence-building measures, demilitarization, and economic rehabilitation. Only then could they discuss status. The Joint Control Commission (JCC) was trying to combine the peace plans of Saakashvili and Kokoity, which contained common elements. The JCC meeting in May had created a group to discuss modalities. Russia was trying to

convene another JCC meeting, the 50th, in Tbilisi. But the Georgians were floating proposals for alternative negotiating mechanisms, and this showed they were "not very serious."

15. (C) Kramer responded that the June 1 statement by Russia's foreign ministry appeared to move away from Russia's previous support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. What did Russia have against supporting Georgian territorial integrity? Kelin said that the principles of "territorial integrity" and "self-determination" had been vying with one another since 1917, with one or the other dominating at any given time. Every settlement depended upon a "mixture" of these principles, and the balance varied. Asked why the June 1 statement called into question the legality of Georgia's territorial integrity, Kelin said there were no treaties fixing borders in the South Caucasus. Russia was still negotiating its borders with Azerbaijan.

16. (C) Kramer responded that border demarcation is one thing; calling into question the sovereignty and territorial integrity of an entire country is very different. The U.S. had always recognized Russia's territorial integrity in the face of Chechen separatism. In contrast, the totality of Russia's actions left the impression in Washington that Russia supported separatism and even annexation. Kramer cited Russian actions to unify North and South Ossetian TV broadcasting, the telephone system, and gas pipelines.

17. (C) Kelin quoted Putin as saying that Russia had no aspiration to join to Russia any part of any other country. Kelin asserted that Russia only wanted its interlocutors to deal realistically with South Ossetia's refusal to be part of Georgia. Russia had two goals. The first was to prevent renewed fighting and bloodshed. Kelin noted that Russia's

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PKF had not been augmented and stood at 500 personnel. Second, Russia would help South Ossetia economically. It would announce nearly USD 3 million in humanitarian assistance at the June 14 Donors Conference.

18. (C) Kramer detailed the involvement of Russian citizens and officials in the South Ossetian government. Kelin replied that "the State Department should not be so suspicious," though he admitted that "PM" Morozov was from Kursk. Kramer reiterated that Russian actions run counter to the two goals Kelin had outlined, and which the U.S. shared. He asked Russia to take into account the impression its actions left in Tbilisi, whose suspicions grew as a consequence. Both the U.S. and Russia wanted stability, Kramer said, and we could therefore not understand why Russia took actions that were provocative and could lead to violence. Kramer suggested that Putin could use his meeting with Saakashvili to reassure Georgia on Russia's position on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

19. (C) Kelin responded that Russia also looked at the impressions Georgian actions left in the North Caucasus, which was full of "very militant personalities." Georgia was arming. It now had four brigades trained by the U.S., the largest in Gori, near South Ossetia. Every day they stopped peacekeepers instead of facilitating their work. Now the Georgians had put two new demands on the table after fifteen years: that the PKF receive Georgian visas and change their itinerary to enter their zone of operations. Kelin reiterated that Russia cannot accept Georgian demands on visas, which are part of the Georgian strategy to "chase" the peacekeepers out of the country. "Until the Georgians settle with South Ossetia on terms acceptable to both sides," he vowed, "we will not leave."

110. (C) Kramer warned that instability in the South Caucasus could spill over into the North. He noted that the "presidents" of three separatist entities were holding a meeting in Sukhumi. The reception the separatists received from the Russian government sent the wrong message. Kelin

noted that the three "presidents" might issue a statement forming their own "commonwealth," but "this does not make us happy." Kramer asked whether, if indeed it did not make Russia happy, Russia would make a statement discouraging such a development. After some waffling, Kelin said he would think about it, but noted that the conflicts were all at different stages of resolution. Kelin noted that Azerbaijan had protested an exhibition booth at which the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities hung their flag. "Because we have good relations with Azerbaijan," Russia had taken measures to meet Azerbaijan's concerns. But "hearing nastiness every day from Tbilisi," Russia was not in a mood to meet Georgian concerns.

¶11. (C) Kramer asked whether Russia gave regions of other countries the same reception it gave to the separatist "presidents." Kelin replied that Russia would meet with Akhalkalaki Armenians, if asked, because the Russian base there had been the sole employer in the region. He noted that the ethnic Azeris of Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region also feel "abandoned." Kramer asked why Russia received Abkhaz and South Ossetian leaders Bagapsh and Kokoity as presidents. Kelin replied that "this is our small play with Georgia." Kramer responded that it was not a game, but a serious matter. Russia should avoid such actions -- especially in support of criminal regimes such as Kokoity's -- and calm Tbilisi's suspicions.

¶12. (C) Turning to Abkhazia, Kramer called the revival of the Coordinating Council an encouraging step. Kelin agreed, but noted that the three working groups had not formed, owing to the Georgian inclusion of the Defense Minister of the Abkhazia government-in-exile on the delegation.

¶13. (C) At the end of the discussion on Georgia, Kelin summed up the state of Russian-Georgian relations. He hoped for better cooperation and better relations. Much more would then be possible. Relations would only get worse if Saakashvili tried to push "something radical" at the G-8. Even with a good Putin-Saakashvili meeting, prospects of a Putin visit to Georgia were remote for now. "Too many things stand between us," Kelin said. He outlined a worst-case scenario: Saakashvili emerges from his meeting with Putin and announces that he had been unable to achieve any Russian concessions on the PKO in South Ossetia. The Georgian Parliament and Government adopt a resolution to expel the Russian PKO, but Russia's peacekeepers "won't move." Then, in July, the process is repeated on the Abkhazia PKO, and again Russia does not move. "By August," he continued, "tensions would be rising very high."

Nagorno-Karabakh

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¶14. (C) Kramer praised U.S.-Russian cooperation on Nagorno-Karabakh. He mentioned A/S Fried's positive impressions of his trip to the region with DFM Karasin, and said it was an example of what Russia and the U.S. could accomplish together. Kelin agreed, and asked for U.S. views on next steps after the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers met in Paris. Russian negotiator Merzlyakov had reported little new progress and warned against raising expectations for quick results. Kramer and Kelin agreed that there was not enough new progress to take to the G-8 Summit. Kramer suggested that a discussion at the G-8 Ministerial would be appropriate, along with a short statement that demonstrated the commitment of all G-8 members, not just the Co-Chair countries. Kelin was encouraging, but made no promises. He said that it was now up to the sides to make progress.

Comment

¶15. (C) Kelin's words on self-determination are the new Russian line on conflicts. They capitalize on Western acceptance of self-determination for Montenegro and Kosovo. Kelin's stress on stability echoes what Moscow observers have said of Russian strategy for the CIS and "frozen conflicts:" that Russian policy clings to the status quo, preferring a permanent freeze to either resolution or renewal of fighting.

Kelin implied that this was to satisfy domestic political concerns, i.e., the identity politics of ethnic kin of Ossetians and Abkhaz in Russia's restive North Caucasus region. Kelin was more frank than most Russians about games Russia is playing to irritate Georgia, putatively in response to Georgian "nastiness." His hints about the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Azeris of Kvemo Kartli echo calls by Moscow's chattering class to "activate" those communities against Georgia (something both Armenia and Azerbaijan have always tried to discourage).

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